



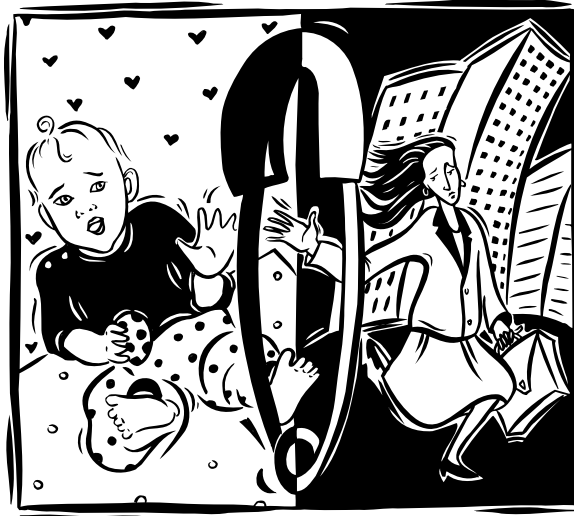
## *The Toughest Transition*

# Leaving Your Child to Return to Work

Your parental leave is drawing to a close. As you get ready to trade your infant's coos for the steady hum of the workplace, you'll probably notice lots of questions, fears and emotions starting to surface. You can make your transition from home to work much easier if you consider the changes that lie ahead.

### **Be Prepared for Strong Feelings**

Before you pack your briefcase and prepare your work wardrobe, ready yourself for the emotional impact of leaving your baby. Most parents experience doubt, guilt and grief as they re-enter the workplace. Admit these feelings to yourself and talk them over with your spouse. Seek out people who understand you and your situation, such as other parents and family members.



you return to work. Begin with one or two hours during which you demonstrate your method of feeding, diapering and putting your baby to sleep. Next, have the caregiver come for half a day while you leave the house for part of that time. When you finally do return to work, try to ease yourself back into a schedule by working half-days or at home part of the day. If you've chosen a day care center, spend time with your infant at the

location, getting to know the people and routines.

### **Understand the Psychology of Separation**

Separation is easier for babies younger than 6 months. That's the age an infant becomes more firmly attached to the parents and will protest being left with anyone else. Your child will protest when you leave—this is necessary and healthy. But it's also important that she develop a strong, caring relationship with a trusted caregiver. Children in day care may develop less intense emotional reactions. When you come into view, your baby may turn away, as if to gather her emotions. These intense reactions are necessary precursors to a passionate reunion with you.

### **Shift Gears Gradually**

If you've hired an in-home caregiver, arrange for the person to spend time with you and your baby before

### **Time to Say Goodbye**

Always say goodbye before you go. Sneaking out teaches your child that you can't be trusted. Comfort your baby for a few minutes if she begins to fuss, but don't linger. Chances are the tears will stop shortly after you leave. If you need reassurance, call the caregiver from work.

### **Adjustment Happens Over Time**

A few other ideas can make leaving easier. It helps to remember that in the hands of a trusted, competent child care provider, your child may have positive experiences with other children she might not have had staying home alone with you. Also, as a working parent, you're helping your child learn to adapt to change and develop the confidence that she can overcome her fears and frustrations.